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ABSTRACT

As a result of a pilot program developed to foster communication between the regular class teacher and the special education resource teacher, a survey was completed by 103 teachers. Surveys were then statistically analyzed to determine the attitudes of the regular classroom teacher toward the special education resource program. Teachers were asked questions regarding their present grade level assignment and their knowledge/experience regarding special education. None of the items related to grade level, having special education students in the classroom, coursework in special education, or knowledge of special education resource programs had a significant effect on total scores. Among other findings were that while 98 percent responded in favor of continual communication between regular class and special education resource teachers, only 74 percent believed that the regular class teacher had any obligation to inform the resource teacher of new concepts for which the resource student would be responsible or for the tests the student must take; and that although 98 percent had resource students mainstreamed into their classes, less than 50 percent had ever taken a special education course. (CL)

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Survey of Teacher Attitudes Toward the Role of the Resource Program

Tenth Annual Meeting
Mid-South Educational Research Association

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INTRODUCTION

With the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), now in force, one can read about the implementation of the law and how it will affect the education of the disabled child. What seems to be left unsaid is any statement directed toward the attitudes of the non-disabled. Are the nondisabled ready to accept the disabled? Or more specifically, will the nondisabled teacher accept those children with learning disabilities? Will learning disabled children find classrooms where positive attitudes toward them will be evident?

One of the positive steps that has been taken in education today, because of PL 94-142, is the recognition that each child has a right to be taught in a manner that is commensurate with his strengths and weaknesses. Included in regular classrooms are children who once would have been placed in special schools or at least special classes. However, the negative aspect of this is that the attitude of the classroom teacher toward the special education student and special education teacher does not appear to be as positive as it could be. One has only to visit teachers' lounges or listen to teachers enrolled in graduate classes to learn that the classroom teacher feels overburdened when special education children are mainstreamed into the regular classroom.

No matter whether the disability is a mental one or a physical one, disabled people often express the idea that the negative attitudes of the nondisabled toward them is more of a limiting factor than the actual disability itself (Fix & Rohrbacker, 1977). Itzhak Perlman, the pro-

fessional violinist, was quoted as saying "Steps are not the only barrier we face, the attitudes of other people are sometimes the toughest." ("People," 1981).

If disabled adults find it difficult to deal with negative attitudes which are directed toward them, then one would wonder how these same negative attitudes would affect school age children. It is highly probable that if disabled children are confronted by negative attitudes, their chances of meeting academic success are lessened. Today with over 3 million special education students with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities enrolled in the school systems, it is increasingly more important that steps be taken to insure that positive environments are provided for them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most of the research concerning attitudes and the disabled, has focused on the attitudes toward the physically disabled. Recently more attention has been given the attitudes of teachers toward the learning disabled and the learning disability program.

Bond and Dietrich recently conducted a survey and found that classroom teachers who had negative attitudes toward the special education resource program also had negative attitudes toward the special education children who were mainstreamed into their classrooms. The survey was constructed and administered as the result of a pilot program Dietrich had written for student teachers. The pilot program had been designed

to foster communication between the regular classroom teacher and the special education resource teacher. The major goal of the program was to encourage student teachers from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, to work together in program planning and implementation for the benefit of the special education student. Dietrich and Bond held bi-monthly meetings with the student teachers. The meetings were for the purpose of monitoring progress, the sharing of ideas, and the implementing of adaptations. General goals were established for all participants as well as the identification of nine specific behavioral objectives. The behavioral objectives were:

For the General Education Teacher:

—to report progress in class to resource teacher

—to identify areas of concern (academic and behavior) in a large group setting

—to provide classroom schedule to resource teacher regarding scheduling for resource

—to inform resource teacher when tests or new concepts will be presented so that pre-teaching may be initiated

Special Education Teacher (resource):

—to conference with general education teacher concerning IEP's

—to relate specific strengths and weaknesses of child to general education teacher; explain characteristics of particular handicapping conditions

—to give some estimate of performance expectancy in regular classroom when activities are being presented which are above child's ability level

--if a behavior modification program is being carried out in resource, suggestions for continuation in regular classroom may be provided when deemed appropriate.

At the end of the pilot program an evaluation was carried out.

The evaluation was based on the nine behavioral objectives using a question type format. Although eight of the nine objectives were met in terms of communication, this communication did not appear to facilitate change. The student teachers appeared to view those objectives as requirements set by the college staff rather than viable methods for helping the students. It was found, to a degree, that stereotypes had already been established. The regular classroom student teacher continued to attribute poor classroom performance to behavior and lack of motivation rather than deficits in skill areas. The special education student teacher tended to protect the students rather than attempt changes in curriculum to aid their regular classroom performance. Interaction during group conferences was often hindered because of these views.

While the regular classroom student teacher and the resource student teacher recognized the need for a mutual involvement that was directed toward benefiting the resource child, they both became involved in the role of two separate teaching responsibilities. The question then arose: 'Were the student teachers modeling, what they perceived as appropriate

behaviors being exhibited by their cooperating teachers?"

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In an attempt to answer this question, Bond and Dietrich designed a survey to assess teacher attitudes toward the special education resource program. Upon completion of the first writing of the survey it was given to six faculty members, three from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and three from the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation. After making a few changes the survey was given to a graduate class in special education. The students enrolled in the class were resource teachers serving in the city and county school systems. The teachers were first asked to complete the survey without being told its purpose. After completing the survey they were then told of its purpose and were asked to go back over the questions making any changes they thought necessary. Specifically, the language of each question was examined to determine if certain phrases might influence a response either negatively or positively. Changes were made in the survey and it was then given to a class of junior education majors enrolled in a developmental reading class. Based on their comments further refinements were made and the survey was administered to teachers in grades kindergarten through six who were teaching in a local private school. After tabulating the results and comments of the private school teachers final refinements were made and 300 surveys were mailed to teachers in the city and county school systems. The 300 names were randomly selected from the two district

directories. Of the 300 surveys mailed 103 were returned. These surveys were statistically analyzed to determine the attitudes of the regular classroom teacher toward the special education resource program.

Bond and Dietrich's purpose for writing the survey was to answer the following questions:

Question 1 Was there any relationship between grade level taught and the teacher's attitude toward the special education resource program?

Question 2 Was there any relationship between having special education children enrolled in the regular classroom and the teacher's attitude toward the special education resource program?

Question 3 Was there any relationship between having had a special education course and the teacher's attitude toward the special education resource program?

Question 4 Was there any relationship between having had a special education course and the teacher's response to the three questions about the special education program?

Question 5 Was there any relationship between the responses to the three questions and the teacher's attitudes toward the special education resource program?

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Statistical procedures for analysis of collected data included use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Chi Square, and Analysis of Variance. A reliability coefficient of .59 for the survey was determined

through the use of the Kuder Richardson Reliability Coefficient.

With a possible score of 156, indicating a positive attitude, the tabulated scores for the survey ranged from 105 to 153. The mean score was 142.62. While the scores for the teachers in the county schools were higher than the teachers in the city schools, this was not a statistically significant factor. The means and standard deviations for each group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations

Source	N	Mean	sd
City School Teachers	66	141.5455	8.0138
County School Teachers	37	144.5676	6.3181
Combined Group	103	142.6311	7.5589

The teachers were asked to complete statements which indicated: 1) their present grade level assignment; 2) if they had taken a special education course; 3) if they had special education students assigned to their classrooms; and 4) if not, had they ever had special education students. Following these statements were three questions designed to assess whether or not the teachers had even the most basic knowledge of special education programs.

Analysis of Variance was used to determine whether grade level taught, having special education children in the classroom, course

work in special education, and knowledge of special education resource programs had a significant effect on total scores. None of the items were found to be statistically significant with the total score. The means and standard deviation for the above items appear in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations by Grade Level

Source	N	Mean	sd
K	3	147.0000	3.0000
1	18	142.5000	7.2513
2	15	141.8000	6.5596
3	19	141.6316	6.9699
4	18	145.6667	4.2703
5	17	139.7647	11.4266
6	13	143.7692	7.2933

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations by
Special Education Children in the Classroom

Source	N	Mean	sd
Yes, Special Education Children in Classroom	90	142.7667	7.3882
No, Special Education Children in Classroom	13	141.6923	8.9292

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations by
Course in Special Education

Source	N	Mean	sd
Yes, Course in Special Education	44	143.9318	6.8008
No, Course in Special Education	59	141.6610	7.9970

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations by
Basic Knowledge of Special Education Program

Source	N	Mean	sd
Answered Questions Correctly	89	142.8876	7.5730
Did Not Answer Questions Correctly	14	141.0000	7.5045

Chi Square was used to determine if having had a special education course had any effect on how the teachers answered the three basic questions about special education programs. It was found that having a course in special education made no difference in how the teachers answered the questions.

Pearson Product Moment Correlations were obtained to determine significant correlations between questions as well as between each

question and total score. Statistically significant correlations existed between low test scores and responses to those questions which dealt with attitudes toward special education students.

SUMMARY

While most of the results were not statistically significant, there were some interesting patterns which emerged.

The majority of the teachers responded correctly to each of the three true/false questions concerning special education teachers and programs. Those questions as well as many of the survey questions dealt with attitudes toward existing programs rather than technical information provided in a college course. Therefore, it is tenuous to assume that having taken a course in special education would affect the teachers attitude toward the special education resource program.

Of interest was the finding that while 98 percent of the respondents were in favor of continuial communication between the regular classroom teacher and the special education resource teachers, only 74 percent believed that the regular classroom teacher had any obligation to inform the special education resource teacher of those new concepts for which the resource student would be responsible or for the tests he had to take. Finally, 78% of those teachers who favored communication between the two types of teachers thought that the resource teacher should set a schedule that worked around the classroom teacher rather than the two working toward a mutually agreed schedule. In addition,

of those respondents who had the more negative attitudes 24 percent did not believe that special education resource students would benefit from mainstreaming. Also, 17 percent thought that the regular students would not learn as well when in classrooms with mainstreamed special education resource students. Finally, 28% of those teachers believed that special education resource students tended to be more disruptive than the other students in the regular classroom.

And finally, it was discovered that while 98 percent of the teachers had special education resource students mainstreamed into their classes, less than 50 percent had ever taken a special education course.

Many of the returned questionnaires included narrative comments in addition to formal responses which clarified or contradicted the selected responses. This led investigators to believe that more information could be obtained when the questionnaire has been refined and many of the questions restated.

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